

ExCo 7 Discussion on CGIAR System Priorities for Research¹

Development of Strategic Framework for Assessing Priorities in the CGIAR

A draft paper on the strategic framework was distributed to ExCo. SC Chair noted that this is a very rough working document. Two of the priority areas, policy and national capacity strengthening, cut across all of the others for the most part. SC is examining how to address this issue, in particular for policies, as some activities in the policy area are in the form of free-standing research generating global public goods (GPGs). An additional topic covering policies at the macro level might be added.

The SC suggests that a sharply focused set of System priorities be developed and 80-90 percent of CGIAR's resources be allocated to those priorities. It will invite Centers, outside experts and interested donors for consultations on priority topics. To maintain flexibility and encourage innovation, 10-20 percent of resources should be left undedicated to specific System priorities.

He clarified that the exercise is entirely on programmatic priorities, after which discussions on structure and form would follow. However, it is imperative that discussions of a programmatic nature take place first.

Discussion:

- The focus on reducing poverty should be stronger, and the statement on natural resource management (NRM) is not as focused as it should be. The issue of capacity building and partnership development should also be clearer.
- How will the priorities that are developed find their way into each Center's programs and activities? The priorities need to be translated into outputs, and it's unclear whether it will be done at the System or Center level.
- Has the consultation been widespread enough, including consultations with NARS? Maximum participation to the extent possible should be a goal.
- Are the priorities sharp enough to focus the myriad activities of the CGIAR and is there a mechanism in place to have influence on autonomous Centers to cut non-priority programs back?
- Some members commended the SC for its work in this area and look forward to working with SC to help it focus the priorities.
- Clarification was requested on whether the exercise is focusing on high value crops, commodities or products.
- Has a gap analysis been undertaken to determine what is missing in the System in terms of the priority areas identified? What are the needs for the future?
- Is this reflecting priorities for the CGIAR, or for international agricultural research broadly?

¹ Excerpt from Seventh Meeting of the CGIAR Executive Council (September 13-14, 2004) Summary Record of Proceedings, September 24, 2004.

- Is the intention to have the indicated priority work to be done only by CGIAR Centers or could some activities be carried out by centers/institutions/networks outside the CGIAR?

P. Pinstup-Andersen thanked members for a rich discussion and comments which will be taken into account. He clarified that a final set of priorities can not be set in each of the priority areas identified until consultations are completed. SC can only recommend, not force implementation of the priorities. Donors will be asked to fund priority activities on an unrestricted basis but ultimately this is a donor decision. Priority areas are not yet fully focused and need refinement. He clarified that the study talks about both high value crops which are not covered by the CGIAR, as well as adding value to commodities which are covered by the CGIAR (e.g., via new products). He also noted that genetic conservation of livestock and fish stocks is not excluded. Center staff may not be able to cover all areas in all cases, so they may have to build capacity in some new areas. He explained that the priorities were not limited to the 15 Centers, but it is too early to guess what other institutions will be involved.

Conclusions:

- *I. Johnson thanked SC and noted that it is off to an excellent start. The priorities study will be discussed at both the Stakeholders and Business Meeting at AGM04. He cautioned that the System's priorities should not be set through a popularity contest. The process of consultation should be documented for transparency so that all could see how the recommended priorities were determined.*